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spitler woods

STATE NATURAL AREA

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CONSERVATION

THE AREA

Spitler Woods State Natural Area is a 202 acre forested area just 8 miles southeast of Decatur and ½ mile east of Mt. Zion, off Illinois Route 121. The site was named for Mrs. Ida B. Spitler, who donated much of the land to the State in 1937 for the purpose of preserving for posterity this area of shaded ravines and towering trees.

NATURAL HISTORY

Large areas of east central Illinois were once covered with thick forests. When the area which comprises Spitler Woods was first surveyed in April of 1821 it was described as "gently rolling woods composed mainly of oak, hickory, walnut and maple trees". The understory of plants include a wide variety of wildflowers. Among the more prominent are the dogtooth violet, jack-in-the-pulpit, dutchman's breeches, wild geranium, buttercup, may apple, red trillium, black-eyed susan, woodland sunflower, solomon's seal, blue bells and anemone. Sassafras was also abundant and was used as a herbal drink by early area settlers.

Because Mrs. Spitler had a deep love for nature Spitler Woods did not fall prey to the clear cutting and farming which destroyed virtually all of central Illinois' forests. During her lifetime she took care to see that no timber was cut on the site, nor did she allow hunting on her land. Consequently, the woods retained many varieties of trees and shrubs native to central Illinois and became a haven for birds and animals.

More than one hundred and sixty years after the site was first surveyed, sturdy oak, walnut, and hickory trees still provide a soft dense canopy for the many species of birds found here. Wildlife still come to drink from Squirrel Creek as it trickles through the woodlands. While strolling along the trails through this peaceful nature preserve, one may catch a glimpse of deer, rabbits, squirrels, opossums, raccoons, woodchucks or field mice.

NATURE PRESERVE

Two-thirds of Spitler Woods State Natural Area is a dedicated nature preserve containing one of the few remaining stands of climax growth timber in Illinois. In order to insure that future generations may enjoy the unspoiled beauties of the forest, visitors are requested to remain on the marked trails. Nothing should be removed from the nature preserve: flowers and leaves may not be picked, nuts and mushrooms may not be harvested and firewood may not be gathered.

FACILITIES

DAY USE

Spitler Woods has a large day use facility with many picnic areas convenient to parking spaces. Picnic tables and fire blocks are provided. Visitors are asked not to build fires on the ground: please use the fire blocks. All picnic areas are adjacent to restrooms, drinking water, horseshoe pits, volleyball courts and playgrounds. There are both large and small picnic shelters available on a first come basis. An enclosed picnic pavilion and a large open picnic shelter may be reserved by contacting the Site Superintendent. A softball area, 2 soccer fields and a frisbee golf course provide other options for the visitor.

TRAILS

There are two trails that wind through the nature preserve. Red Oak Ramble is a ½ mile trail specifically designed for those with physical limitations. Squirrel Creek Trail is a 2 mile hiking trail of moderate difficulty, but with numerous steep grades. Trail users are required to stay on the marked trails in the nature preserve. Please remember that nothing may be removed from the nature preserve. All pets must be on a leash.

In addition to the two nature trails, Spitler Woods also offers a ½ mile physical fitness trail with a specially designed jogging surface and 11 exercise stations.

GROUP CAMPING

Although individual camping is prohibited in Spitler Woods, an area is provided for organized group camping. Reservations and camping permits should be secured from site staff.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Admittance will not be granted to groups of 25 or more to any state park or natural area unless permission has been secured from the site staff to use the facilities. It is required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors.

For reservations or further information, contact Site Superintendent, 705 Spitler Park Drive, Mt. Zion, Illinois 62549. Phone: 217/864-3121.

For information on other Land and Historic Sites, write the Illinois Department of Conservation, Land and Historic sites, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62706.

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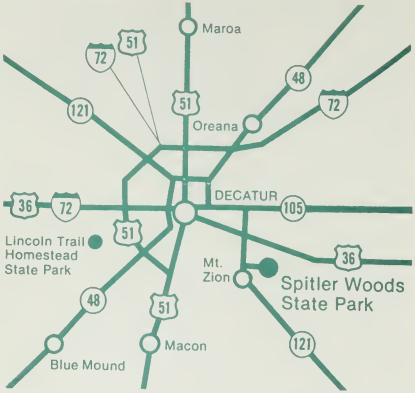

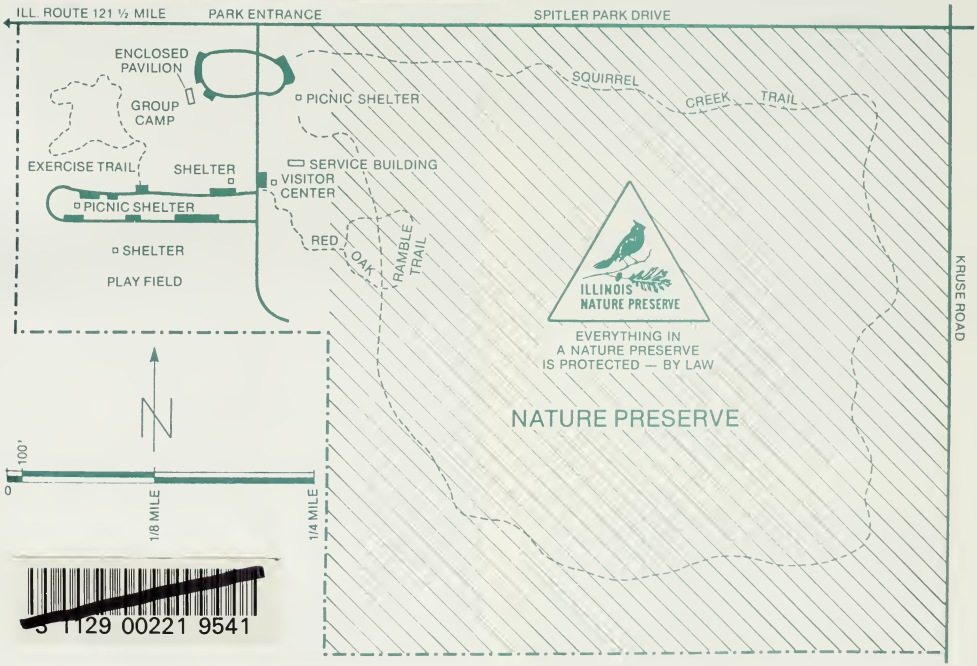

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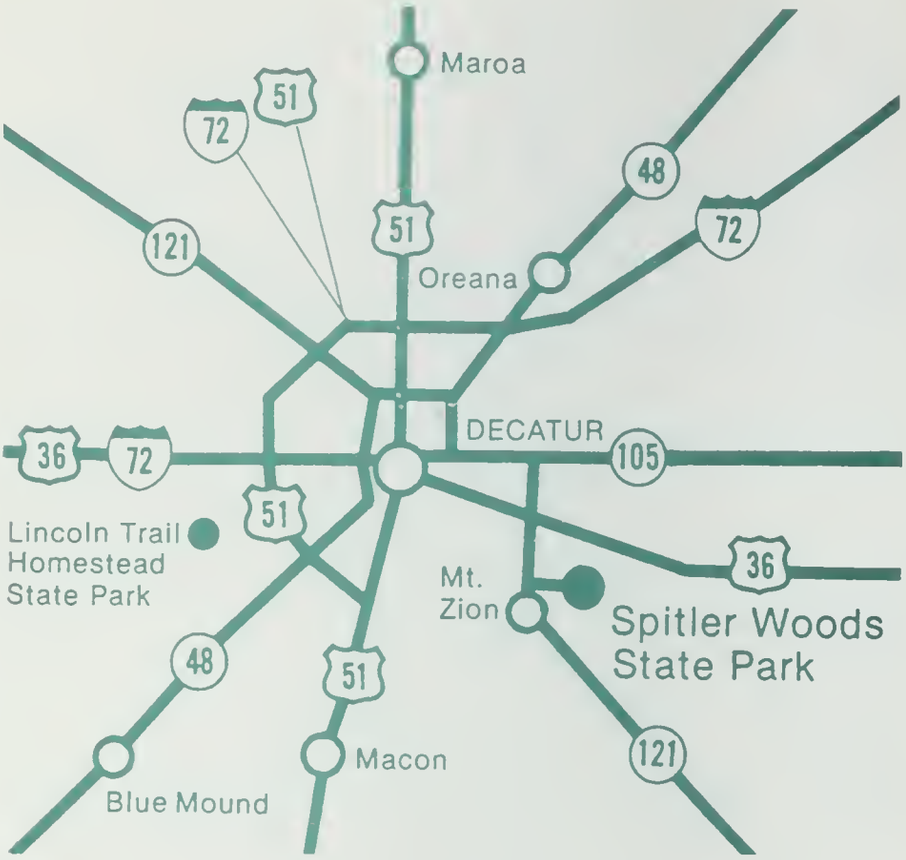

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